

**United States Environmental Protection Agency  
Criminal Investigation Division  
Investigative Activity Report**

**Case Number:**

1000-0494

**Case Title:**

Cooke Aquaculture Fish Farm Release

**Subject of Report:**

2018-03-21 Interview of [REDACTED]

**Reporting Office:**

Seattle, WA, Area Office

**Activity Date:**

March 21, 2018

**Reporting Official and Date:**

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

30-MAR-2018, Signed by: [REDACTED]

**Approving Official and Date:**

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
31-MAR-2018, Approved by: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**SYNOPSIS**

On March 21, 2018, [REDACTED] interviewed [REDACTED], [REDACTED], in [REDACTED] Washington, regarding his knowledge of the events surrounding the Cooke Aquaculture Atlantic Salmon release on August 19, 2017.

**DETAILS**

On March 21, 2018, I interviewed [REDACTED] [REDACTED] regarding his knowledge of the events surrounding the Cooke Aquaculture Atlantic Salmon release on August 19, 2017. After being notified of the identity of the interviewing agent and the nature of the interview, [REDACTED], provided, in substance, the following information:

**BACKGROUND:**

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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**JULY 2017 NET PEN FAILURE INCIDENT:**

On or about July 24, 2017, late in the evening, he received a phone call from [REDACTED] of Cooke Aquaculture. [REDACTED] was working with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] explained that the Cooke Aquaculture Net Pen #2 had broken away from its moorings and they needed assistance. [REDACTED] was requesting the Lovric tug to assist. He could not get there that night, but told [REDACTED] that he would arrive in the morning.

He arrived in the morning along with the tug from Culbertson Marine Construction and rendered assistance. He met with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] on site. During the recovery of net pen #2 he felt that [REDACTED] was completely mismanaging the entire recovery project. There were times during the recovery where he had to take over the recovery because [REDACTED] couldn't make a decision. He felt like there were a lot of Cooke employees sitting around waiting for instructions. He started giving the Cooke employees orders and implementing a plan for the recovery.

Net pen #2 was pushed into its center like "an accordion" by the tides. The net pen had drifted away from its original position, close to net pen #1. It was still intact, but parts were pushed upward, out of the water, but the parts were hinged. It appeared that the structure maintained its integrity and eventually came back into its original shape.

During the recovery, he and the Cooke crews were working between the tides as several of the tides were severe. After reattachment of several anchors, a second severe tide hit the structure and began breaking mooring lines that had been repaired. They just tried to keep the net pen stable during the severe tides and then worked on it when the tides receded. He saw that the nets of net pen #2 were "dirty" with mussels and seaweed.

At one point during the recovery, after the Harley Marine tug was attached to the net pen, [REDACTED] had the tugs pushing on the net pens in the middle of the structure. This was not working and he ([REDACTED] wanted Cooke to pull the nets up off the bottom to assist the movement but that did not happen. He felt that this was not helping the situation and then moved the tugs to the outside of the net pen. This allowed the net pen to "get off the beach" and start moving back to its original position.

Some other personnel from Cooke Aquaculture arrived on scene, including two people he would deem "professionals," and knew how to recover the net pen. [REDACTED] of [REDACTED], arrived on scene. [REDACTED] stated to him that he was "out of his league" but assisted in the recovery.

Eventually [REDACTED], the Cooke [REDACTED], sent four new anchors to him for placement with the

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net pen. [REDACTED] was “pissed off” and swearing at him about the actions he was taking, but he moved to the north end of the pens and set three of the four new anchors. The “Elsie,” a Cooke tug arrived and assisted in setting the new anchors. At this point, [REDACTED] stopped communicating with him. He was there working on the recovery for approximately four days before [REDACTED] sent him and the Elsie tug back home.

**OPINION ON JULY FAILURES:**

In his opinion, [REDACTED] could not handle the job of the recovery of the net pen. [REDACTED] had very poor communication skills and eventually would not speak to anyone. In his opinion “all blame goes on [REDACTED] for the poor conditions of the net pen and lack of planning for its recovery.

[REDACTED] should have pulled the nets and removed the fish out of net pen #2 because the net pen was old. Anchors were bad and he is pretty sure some Atlantic Salmon escaped during this incident, because he saw how the net pens were “jumbled up” and twisted due to the moorings breaking. Cooke Aquaculture had room in other aquaculture sites or the company could have simply harvested the fish and taken the loss. The fish could have been made into fish meal. The failure to remove the fish after this incident was “stupid.”

The density of the fish, lack of maintenance on the net pen, aging and rusty metal structures, nets chafing and the nets being dirty led to this problem. Cooke Aquaculture knew all about the problems with this structure and did nothing to correct it until it broke loose. He called [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and left him a message, asking the question “what are you guys doing?” Cooke never returned the phone call. Cooke Aquaculture “got greedy” and should have pulled the fish out of the net pens in July of 2017.

**AUGUST 2017 NET PEN FAILURE INCIDENT:**

On or about August 19, 2017, he received another call from [REDACTED] explaining that net pen #2 was again drifting away from its original position. He explained to [REDACTED] that he would not assist if [REDACTED] was in charge again. He eventually went out to net pen #2 and found it to be destroyed. The employees of Cooke were watching it collapse.

When he offered that his tug and the Culbertson tugs were ready to assist, they were told to “stand by.” He contacted [REDACTED], who informed him that [REDACTED] was not communicating with him either. He became frustrated because they could not get any answers. His observation was that the Cooke employees were standing around having meetings rather than taking actions.

In the meantime, he arranged for several barges in the area to begin moving to the net pen to place fish inside for temporary storage. He began calling local fishermen in the area and requesting that they head to the net pen to transfer fish to their fishing vessels. When he first began arranging for the barges, he does not believe that all the fish had escaped and could have been captured. [REDACTED] found out about this activity and

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said "no." At that point, he contacted [REDACTED] and told him that he and the Lovric equipment were leaving. Later, [REDACTED] ultimately decided that Cooke needed a crane barge, but that was days after it was destroyed.

He was contacted on his way out by the [REDACTED] tug which was participating in the August recovery. [REDACTED] was requesting information on what to do in response because no one from Cooke was responding. He did not have a satisfactory answer for the [REDACTED].

THOUGHTS ON [REDACTED]:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON COOKE:

He believes that Cooke Aquaculture is lying to its employees about what happened during the aforementioned incidents and about the future. Cooke Aquaculture recently unloaded sixteen new anchors and told the employees that they will be installing a new net pen soon. He knows this is not happening as Cooke Aquaculture does not have permits.

[REDACTED]

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